DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 729 EA 012 227

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TITLE Discipline: A Review of Selected Literature.
INSTITUTION San Diego County Dept. of Education, Calif.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 23p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; *Change Strategies; Corporal Punishment; *Delinquency Causes; Discipline Policy; *Discipline Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; Problem Solving; School Security; *School Vandalism; *Student School Relationship; *Violence

ABSTRACT

The nature of school discipline problems has changed over the past few decades. In the 1950s, teachers thought that fighting, stealing, and disrespect toward authority were the most serious forms of student misbehavior. Violent assaults on teachers and pupils, gang warfare, burglary, extortion, and destruction of school property are included among the discipline problems of today. The existence of these problems is well documented. Some of the causes, as suggested by research studies, are peer and gang influences, televised aggression, and poor home conditions. Negative school experiences considered as causal factors include large classes, incompetent and indifferent teachers, lack of authority in the schools, and irrelevant curriculum. Some measures that research findings indicate may help solve the problems are teaching school personnel alternative classroom instructional and management techniques; involving students, parents, and the community in developing corrective measures; strong leadership by principals; and rules of conduct that are specific, publicized, and enforced. (Author/MLF)

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DISCIPLINE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

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November 1979

EA 012 227

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William O'Connor
Boston School Committee

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DISCIPLINE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The proper functioning of any social system requires some regulation of its members. This is as true for a school system as it is for a society. Smith (1) reports that for a school system to function properly the conduct of pupils must conform to conditions that are conducive to learning. Principals and teachers are by statutes and board regulations charged with the responsibility for maintaining such order in the school. In California a school district is not liable for injury to students going to, or coming from, school unless it willingly accepts such responsibility. (EC 44808) It can, however, discipline students for misbehavior going to, or coming from, school. (EC 48900) The burden of maintaining order and dealing with the various forms of disorder that may occur in the school falls primarily upon the shoulders of the classroom teachers, since they have a larger proportion of contact hours with pupils than do other personnel.

The procedures, including rules, by which order is maintained in a school are referred to as discipline. In general the system of discipline in a school will reflect the system or values desired by the society.

CHANGING NATURE OF DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

Misbehavior has changed over the past few decades. In 1949, Henning (2) conducted a study involving 225 high school principals and found that they rated the following as the most serious forms of misbehavior: lying, showing disrespect for faculty, petty thievery and congregating in the halls and lavatories.

A review by Stouffer and Owens (3) in 1955 revealed that 32 percent of teachers studied in 1927 thought undesirable personality traits such as fighting, stealing and disrespect toward authority, was one of the most serious problems and 31 percent of the teachers studied in 1952 held the same view.

In 1969, the first Gallup Poll's annual survey of the public's attitude toward public schools reported that discipline was the most important problem facing the public schools. An effort was made the following year to probe more deeply into this problem with the hope of shedding more light on the views of parents and other groups. When the public was asked whether they thought discipline was "too strict" or "not strict enough," 2% said discipline was "too strict," 53 percent said discipline was "not strict enough," and 31 percent said discipline was "about right." Of those who replied that discipline was "not strict enough," they were then asked: "Can you tell me what you mean? In what way is discipline not strict enough?" Eleven percent said that teachers lacked authority to keep order, 11 percent said that students have too much freedom; they can get away with anything, 6 percent said that students have no respect for their teachers; they pay no attention to them, 3 percent said that rules are not enforced, and 2 percent mentioned vandalism. A substantial majority of each group interviewed agreed that the need for discipline tends to disappear when students become genuinely interested in learning. (4)

Instances of misconduct among pupils in English schools have been classified in a similar manner. A survey of 27 behavior difficulties in English schools showed the highest frequencies occurred for: unsatisfactory attitudes toward school and school work, noise producing and other distracting activities, and uncooperative activities. The highest frequency of misbehavior was in boys' schools; the lowest in girls' schools. (5)

CURRENT ISSUES

Dramatic increases in violence and vandalism have become a national concern. The recent Gallup Poll (6) reported that these increases have been noted not only in our society as a whole but also on our elementary and secondary school campuses. Violent assaults on teachers and pupils, gang warfare, burglary, extortion and destruction of school property are included among the discipline

problems of today. The Senate's judiciary committee headed by Birch Bayh has concluded that violence and vandalism have reached a level of crisis. According to Mayer (7), the Senate's subcommittee on juvenile delinquency, vandalism alone is now costing American taxpayers about $500,000,000 a year. We spend as much on patching up vandalism as we do on textbooks. Some place the blame on our juvenile criminal justice systems. Others place the blame on parents, too much violence on T.V., compulsory school attendance, racial tensions, drugs, etc. Each of these probably do have an influence on some persons. Many of these possible causes appear beyond the ability of educators to change; however, there are factors contributing to violence and vandalism within the school environment that we can change.

The Los Angeles Unified School District spent $7,300,000 for security personnel in the 1978-79 school year and have budgeted $10,000,000 for the 1979-80 school year. This figure is just for salaries and does not include expenses for such things as clerical support, alarm systems and vehicle expenses. This averages out to $15.2/student or $14,858/school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, yet not all schools receive this same level of service. Further, the relationship of school security to a reduction in campus violence and vandalism has not been shown (8). In fact, there is some evidence suggesting that it may be counterproductive.

Sulzer and Mayer (9) reported that violent behavior is a common response after receiving punishment. The small child when spanked by a parent will, in turn, often hit a smaller sibling, a punching bag, parents, or any handy item. A parent who has been criticized at work may "take it out" on his or her family. A student, after being punished verbally or physically by a teacher may destroy school property or fight back in some other manner.

Efforts to eliminate corporal punishment in the schools have met with only sporadic success. As of 1978 only four states, plus a small number of districts and local schools, had statutes or policies prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in schools (10). Yet there seems to be little evidence that hitting or spanking children for school infractions is effective in eliminating the behaviors that are unacceptable.

Polk and Schafer (11) assert that the commitment to delinquent and violent behavior results in large part from negative school experiences, and that there are basic defects in the way schools are organized and impact on youth from low-income families. Non-college-bound youth develop progressively negative attitudes toward formal, college-oriented academic work. The tracking system used in many high schools reinforces this disparity. For low-income youth school comes to be viewed as an irrelevant experience. They note, as have several other researchers, that patterns of misconduct established in school clearly pave the way to delinquent behavior beyond the school. They argue that teachers have low expectations of these youngsters and use inappropriate teaching methods. Restructuring of school programs and reeducation of teachers are needed if the current "loser" cycle is to be reversed for these youth.

Some teachers use punishment as a physical or psychological "hurt" and direct it at certain student behaviors to stop their occurrence. However, Bandura (12), Bandura and Walters (13), have found that observers are likely to imitate such behavior at another time and place. Teachers who attempt to ignore student acts of violence may actually be fostering its growth. When classmates engage in aggressive behaviors, such as hitting or throwing spit wads or other objects, these acts are likely to increase in occurrence and be imitated by other students, particularly males, if ignored by the teacher.

McPartland and McDill (14) in Violence in Schools focus on four classes of behavior problems: (1) attacks, thefts, and withdrawals, (2) drug and alcohol abuse, (3) student protests and demonstrations, and (4) racial and ethnic group tensions. They assert that schools play a direct role in promoting delinquent behavior, to a great extent because schools do not involve students in any of the decisions affecting their lives in school. They feel that the current report card system which reduces all evaluation of performance in a course to a single letter grade has generated a group of perpetual losers. These perpetual losers become the school's discipline problems.

Peer and gang influences seem to be significant factors in the etiology of violent and aggressive behavior in school and delinquency. The Senate Subcommittee on Delinquency (15) reported that modern gangs are extending their activities into areas of absenteeism or truancy. In Psychology Today DeCecco and Richards (16), after interviewing over 8000 students in 60 junior and senior high schools, report that "America's high schools are drifting toward a kind of anarchy. All rules are questioned; students openly defy teachers; students attack one another." In his title for the article DeCecco characterizes the problem dramatically, as "Civil War In The High Schools."

Leifer, Gordon and Groves (17) also reviewed the effects of television on students. They concluded that viewing televised aggression contributes to aggressive behavior. The greater the similarity between events portrayed on television and a student's own surroundings, the more likely that the student will imitate aggression. Leifer et al also discussed the great positive values that might accrue from television programs which model prosocial behavior and attitudes.

Teachers, in the NEA's 1976 nationwide survey (18) on discipline and school violence, cite irresponsible parents and poor home conditions as the two major causes of discipline problems and violence in schools. However, they also go on to list overcrowded classes, irrelevant curriculum, lack of service for exceptional children, and lack of teacher authority as other major contributing causes. Dr. Owen Kiernan, Executive Secretary of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, testifying before the Senate Subcommittee (1975), listed six contributing factors in school violence: (1) lethargic courts which encourage youth to see themselves as not subject to legal control, (2) the openness and lack of control in schools, (3) excessive concern about student rights, (4) teacher apathy, (5) parent ignorance and indifference and (6) collateral educational influences such as TV and films which glorify violence and crime.

The National School Boards Association (19) organized an Ad Hoc Committee on School discipline and surveyed a variety of schools regarding discipline and violence. They concluded that among the contributing factors to the problem are (1) large classes, (2) peer influence, (3) lax enforcement of rules, (4) incompetent and indifferent teachers, (5) poor communication between home and parents, (6) poor home conditions, (7) weak controls in the schools, (8) emergency of student rights, (9) integration which has brought diverse cultures together, (10) weak administrative support and (11) irrelevant curriculum.

Daniel Duke (20) conducted a survey of school administrators and asked them to rank a list of school discipline problems in order of seriousness. Skipping class, truancy and lateness to class were ranked as most serious. Duke also noted that students view theft and fighting as the major problems, probably because these are the problems in which they are victimized. Duke

concludes that each of the three major role groups--administrators, teachers and students--perceive a different set of problems as the major difficulty facing the schools.

Feldhusen, Roeser and Thurston (21) did regression analyses of their data to develop equations to predict social adjustment over a 9-year period. Some of the best long range predictors were the original behavior status as identified by teachers, reading scores, and the father's educational level.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS - A BEGINNING

O'Brien (22) described the In-School Suspension program implemented in Minneapolis high schools for youth who have exhibited such behavior problems as alcoholism, drug abuse, truancy or violence in the classroom. Assignment to the suspension room is usually for a two to five day period. Students assigned to the suspension room must do all their regular assignments plus other special tasks assigned by the suspension room teacher. Assistance from other community agencies is sought to help the youngsters solve their special problems. Evaluations of the program indicate mixed success.

Duke (23) proposed a "Systematic Management Plan for School Discipline" which is uniquely appropriate for junior and senior high schools. There are six major components to the program: (1) collection of accurate data on discipline problems, (2) development of awareness of the school as an institution operated according to rules, (3) rewarding students who obey rules, (4) use of sound methods to resolve conflicts, (5) development of a team approach to handling behavior problems, and (6) in-service education on school discipline. Duke also stresses involvement of students, parents and the community in confronting and clarifying problems and in developing corrective measures.

In the January 1970 issue of The Instructor, in an article entitled "Can We Lessen Vandalism?" Raymond Greenstein (24) stated that the teachers first tool is class discussion. If the level of discussion is on a permissive, low pressure level, reasons for vandalism, such as mischief, thoughtlessness, resentment, maladjustment, and rebellion against authority emerge. Once the reasons have been verbalized, teachers can use a variety of methods to instruct the children. A change in the philosophy or staff of the institution might be necessary in certain cases. If certain buildings in a district suffer more vandalism than others, a little soul searching on the part of the staff and community might be in order. A low level of personal identification with the school and its goals among students, teachers, and parents are found positively associated with a high rate of vandalic behavior among students. Highly damaged schools are found characterized by inadequate administration and leadership, with poor communications among the various members of the school.

In 1978 Meyer and Butterworth (25) completed a study of violence and vandalism prevention that began in 1971 and focused its efforts on K-8 schools. School vandalism costs and incidents showed consistent improvement during each of the four treatment years from 1971 to 1975 for the experimental schools as compared to the remaining district schools. The resuits of this study encouraged the two investigators to begin in 1976 a more formal investigation into the means of reducing school vandalism and violence. Two basic strategies were employed in the project: Identifying practices engaged in by school adult authorities that foster or procreate school violence and vandalism and changing those practices by teaching the adults alternative classroom instructional and management techniques, and assisting them in development of school-wide plans and programs. Through the use of these strategies, an attempt was made to achieve the following objective: The dollar cost of

school vandalism should be at least 25 percent less for experimental schools than for control schools. The magnitude of the result was surprising and has encouraged a more detailed replication study. If such a small effort can be reliably shown to bring about such a marked change, there may be hope for eventually eradicating much of our school violence and vardalism. This would not only benefit students and school personnel but also our community and society.

Strain, Cooke and Apolloni (26) reported that behavior modification programs often cannot be practically administered by teachers because of the time demands of all the students in the classroom. They argue that peers can be used to offset this shortcoming. Peers can be used as models and as reinforcement managers.

Taylor (27) reported eight suggestions by secondary physical education teachers who taught in urban areas. Most believed physical education activities should be extended into community centers as much as possible. Teacher involvement enables students to make more worthwhile use of their free time, thus diverting students from idleness. A summary of several teachers' suggestions includes eight points important to junior and senior high schools.

1. Teachers should commit themselves to helping students improve their self-esteem.

2. Physical educators should gear their programs for success.

3. Develop life-long sport and recreation activities within the curriculum that will immediately be used at local youth centers, neighborhood parks, and other recreational resources in the community.

4. Establish listings of activities, places and persons students can go to for exploring possible enjoyable experiences.

5. Develop an intramural program after school and on weekends for student participation in their community during their free time without the teacher being present.

6. Procedures should be established within physical education courses that identify students with abilities to participate in school athletic teams.

7. Attempt to provide students with group tickets to sporting activities at nearby colleges and professional arenas.

8. A course within the physical education program should be developed and made available every year which is flexible for change and suitable for experimentation. One course should be set aside to incorporate student and teacher suggestions for physical education activities. Guest instructors can be invited to teach a special unit for students.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the principal holds the key to solving problems of school violence. In response to the increased incidences of violence and the indictment of too many administrators who have ignored the problem. Brodbelt (28) reported the Baltimore, Maryland teacher's union initiated a 24-hour operational hotline where teachers could by-pass the administration and report school-related crime or violence directly to a receptive source. "Unless the principal is willing to exert leadership in a forceful and positive manner, develop workshops for his or her teachers, identify and eliminate inadequate teachers who are unwilling or unreceptive to modifying their behavior, and promote a strong community involvement program, problems of violence in the schools are apt to accelerate."

Wint (29) described a high school program implemented at Wyandanch, New York which stressed basic and strict discipline. Prior to the program the school was filled with violence. Three years later after implementing the program, it was peaceful and well organized. The major emphases of the approach were the teaching of skills and abilities in quiet and orderly class-

rooms. The principal runs the school. Rules are clearly stated on the first day and they are enforced. Teachers are backed and punishment of offending students is swift and consistent. Chronic discipline cases are assigned to a separate special classroom. The program is successful in controlling violence.

In contrast to this (30) a University of London team, after studying 12 schools in poor neighborhoods of London for four years, reported that children tended to be better in schools where classes began on time, where teachers gave immediate and frequent praise, and where students were made to feel that success was expected of them. Student achievement was better in schools in which disciplinary policy and the curriculum were discussed and worked out by the teachers, rather than being imposed from above.

Maynard (31) described a program at Cleveland High School in Seattle, Washington which transformed the school from severe problems of violence, race tension, dropouts, and absenteeism to the opposite condition in which all these problems had almost disappeared. A positive school climate was developed and efforts were made to meet the needs of disruptive youth. School was changed to a place perceived by students as designed to help them with meaningful, nonthreatening success experiences in the classroom. Rules of conduct were developed cooperatively by students, staff and administrators. The following guidelines were followed in developing the program:

1. build a positive school climate
2. help students find success
3. model appropriate behavior
4. involve staff and students in all facets of school
5. have open and honest communication
6. build trust
7. model and teach good interpersonal relationships

Webb and Cormier (32) conducted an experimental study in which 22 disruptive junior high students were drawn from four mathematics classes and given a special academic program in which all teaching was guided by explicit behavioral objectives. In addition criterion tests were developed for the objectives and special remedial instruction was designed for the specific objectives and tests. Students were given a list of the objectives, the remedial assignments, and free time when the assignment for a given day was completed. The treatment increased task relevant behavior and reduced disruptive behavior. The treatment effect was maintained when the students went back to traditional instruction.

Van Avery (33) described a humanitarian high school program which he developed in Sarasota, Florida. The purposes were described as "places to come and to go from, places in which to gather, to find support, to learn skills, to meet other people". Collaboration among students, community, parents, school board, staff and administration guided all efforts. School rules were cooperatively enforced. There was respect and trust expected from all involved. Van Avery reports that violence was reduced and there were few complaints from teachers and other school staff regarding student behavior.

Glasser (34) is even more explicit in suggesting how teachers can restore a true humanistic climate which will overcome discipline problems. He urges first that corporal punishment be abolished and then that students be taken into the management process. The teacher must become a person who cares and helps students succeed. The class meeting is at the heart of the Glasser system. Here teachers and students discuss their problems openly and find ways to resolve them. There is also much stress on helping students succeed and getting them to be responsible for their own behavior. Glasser urges that teachers and parents cooperate to control students' TV viewing. Schools Without Failure (35) has helped many teachers develop classrooms in which good behavior is the rule.

Kindsvatter (36) suggested that discipline techniques must be tailored to the student's problem and must be designed to help the student adjust and cope, not just to control him/her. He argues that there are three basic causes of misbehavior in school--(1) severe emotional problems, (2) negative attitudes toward teachers and subject matter or (3) capricious behavior--and the teacher must find a suitable strategy and develop a clear behavioral expectation. Overall, the major initial strategy is for the teacher to hold a private teacher/student conference to clarify the problem. A specific strategy is then implemented, in cooperation with the student, to correct the problem.

Finally, the National School Boards Association's Ad Hoc Committee on Discipline (19) studied the problems in schools throughout the U. S. and examined closely the schools in which successful programs to control violence, delinquency and vandalism were operating. They made six recommendations: (1) establish a school task force composed of parents, teachers, students, administrators and school board members to survey the problems, (2) involve students, teachers, parents, and administrators in developing discipline policies and procedures, (3) formulate and distribute written statements of rules and policies for discipline, (4) provide in-service training on discipline, (5) enforce the rules and prosecute all illegal actions, and (6) establish alternative educational programs in the high school program.

CAN WE BREAK THE CYCLE?

These several sets of guidelines for teachers offer concrete suggestions and strategies to deal with classroom discipline problems. Several writers also call for a general humanization of the school and a restoration of a positive affective climate. DeCecco (16), in his large analysis of the "civil war in the high schools" argued that a humanistic climate must be restored, that schools have become cold, hostile places which breed crime and violence.

He urged that there be open negotiaton among students, teachers, parents and administrators regarding school problems and that the schools become true democratic institutions.

SUMMARY

From this review of the problems, the causes and the cures for violence, crime, delinquency, vandalism, and truancy in schools it is clear that we know the problem very well, the causes are only moderately well known, and for the most part we are guessing about solutions. There is very little research evidence to guide practitioners in developing programs to deal with these discipline problems. Only the field of behavioral management or modification has developed some sound research evidence.

Nevertheless some suggestions seem warranted concerning severe discipline problems at the junior and senior high school level. The following list (37) represents major priorities based on the literature examined in this review:

Schools with severe problems of violence, crime, vandalism and truancy should organize a task force of teachers, parents, administrators and students to survey the problems and develop plans for remedial programs.

In-service programs should be developed to help teachers and administrators learn how to deal effectively with youth behavior problems. Behavior management techniques are especially promising.

Teachers, students, parents, and administrators should cooperate in developing and enforcing school rules.

School curricula should be carefully examined in relation to discipline problems. Alternative in-school programs should be offered to meet the needs of noncollege bound youth and to help all students achieve success in the school program.

Educators should not condone illegal behavior in the school setting. Crime and delinquency should be prosecuted. The school should not be, as it now often is, a safe haven for crime.

Basic skills should be stressed and taught effectively. They are fundamental to success in all aspects of school programs.

The principal must take the lead in developing a positive, humanistic climate in the school. In many big city high schools with huge enrollment, this is a formidable task.

Special classes should be developed within the school for short term treatment of severe discipline problems as an alternative to suspension.

Explicit efforts must be made to involve youth in developing self direction and self control.

Vocational and career education programs should be developed to bridge the gap from school to work of high school students who exhibit severe behavior problems.

Each school should have a system, coordinated by guidance counselors, to diagnose and plan programs for severe discipline cases.

There should be much recognition of positive behaviors of students.

In schools with severe and widespread behavior problems, security devices and personnel should be employed.

Helpful as this literature review promises to be, it will not be enough. All parties to the educational process - students, teachers, administrators, parents - will need to seek better ways cooperatively, and then revise and replace them as the changing society requires.

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